

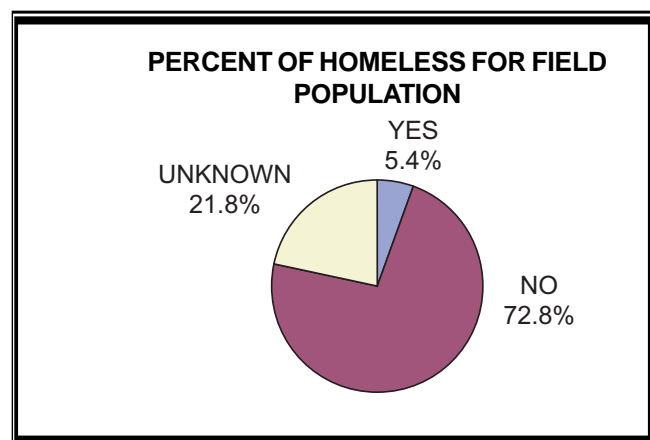
Research has shown that a lack of stable housing is linked to a greater risk of re-offending. Housing instability, particularly with sex offenders, has been a hot topic in the media, but there are a number of definitional issues surrounding “homelessness” that make it difficult to determine how big the problem is for the Washington State Department of Corrections. Currently, homeless offenders on community supervision are captured in the Offender Based Tracking System, but the very definition of homeless may be different for each region, each field office, and even each Community Corrections Officer. One of the definitional issues is whether or not people living in shelters are considered homeless. A second issue is how long an offender must experience homelessness in order to be considered homeless. These are definitional issues that not only the Department faces, but the United States Census Bureau also faced when attempting to count the transitional/homeless population in the 2000 census<sup>1</sup>.

According to the U.S. Census, in 2000 there were 170,706 homeless people living in the United States. Leading states were New York with 18.7 percent of the total homeless population followed by California with 16.2 percent. In Washington State there were 5,387 people in emergency and transitional shelters, which is approximately 3.2 percent of the total homeless population of the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau cautions, however, that this population is a one-night inventory and provides only a “snap shot” of information as opposed to shelter use over time.

Of the total community supervision population in Washington State as of July 31, 2004, 5.4 percent or 2,847 offenders were homeless, 72.8 percent were not (38,268), and data were unknown for 21.8 percent of the population (11,443) (see Chart 1). By comparing the Department’s data to U.S. Census data, it appears that a large proportion of the homeless is on community supervision.

**Chart 1**

The West Central region, which includes King and Pierce counties, had the highest proportion of homeless offenders at 7.5 percent of their total population (see Table 1). West Central accounted for 60 percent of the total homeless population.



<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. “Emergency and Transitional Shelter Population: 2000”. October 2001. <http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/censr01-2.pdf>

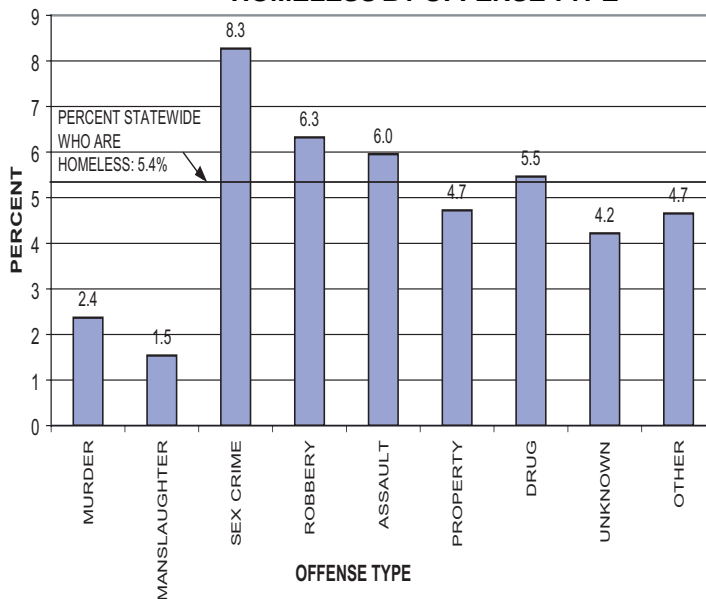
**Table 1**

For the total field population, 77 percent went on to supervision from jail and the remaining 23 percent went on to supervision from prison. For the homeless population, 72 percent went on to supervision from jail compared to 28 percent who went on to supervision from prison.

PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL HOMELESS ACROSS REGIONS		
	N	%
West Central	1,712	60.1%
Southwest	499	17.5%
Northeast	253	8.9%
Northwest	203	7.1%
Southeast	161	5.7%
Headquarters	19	0.7%
Unknown	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,847</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Chart 2**

**PERCENT OF TOTAL FIELD POPULATION WHO ARE HOMELESS BY OFFENSE TYPE**



When looking at crime category for offenders on supervision, sex offenders had the highest percentage who were homeless at 8.3 percent of all sex offenders (see Chart 2). However, of the homeless offender population, 30 percent were drug offenders compared to about 12 percent who were sex offenders.

**Chart 3**

**ACTIVE OFFENDERS BY COMMUNITY CLASSIFICATION AND HOMELESS STATUS**

Forty-three percent of the homeless offenders on active supervision were classified as RMA. This is a disproportionate number of RMA offenders who are homeless considering that 25 percent of the total active field population are classified as RMA.

For more information on homelessness in Washington State, visit the Washington State Coalition for the Homeless web site at: <http://www.endhomelessnesswa.org>

